

# Ancient Enmities:

## Classicism and Religious Others

Renaissance Europe sought to define itself in relation to multiple models, prominent among which were ancient Greco-Roman culture and contemporary non-Christian (as well as Christian heterodox) cultures. The Humanist emulation of classical ideals in text and image occurred within a larger context of religious, ethnic, and frequently military interactions: the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, harassment from North African Corsairs, mass migrations of Jews, and internecine tensions resulting from the Protestant Reformation. The “classical” provided a discourse through which scholars and artists could negotiate a religious, national, or pan-European identity transhistorical in scope yet ultimately presentist in defining “the other”. This panel seeks to explore the function of the classical and classicism across these identities in both textual and material sources.

Points of contact between classical culture and religious others turned antiquity into a battleground of competing traditions. Underlying such tensions was a longstanding sense dating from Homer and Herodotus onwards of classical identity as culturally and geographically contested, its meaning located variously in Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East. Both as traces of ancient ethnographies and as largely presentist rhetoric, projections of classical identity in the Renaissance could be deployed in numerous and diverse ways. Trojan ancestry was claimed not only by various European noble lines, such as the Habsburgs and the Estes of Ferrara, but also by the Turks. Orthodox Greeks under Ottoman rule were ostracized as the barbaric descendants of their enlightened ancestors. Antiquarians in post-Reconquest Spain invented Roman origins to Andalusí architectural marvels, while Roman ruins in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, represented both visually and through ekphrastic description, fueled dreams of European conquest. At the same time, the means by which the classical past were known could be diminished or lost: despite its importance during the Medieval period for accessing intellectual traditions, for example, Arabic struggled to maintain its place in European scholarship as a learned language alongside classical Greek and Latin, and even as other distant foreign traditions, such as Egyptian Hermeticism, fascinated artists and scholars.

The panel addresses two areas that have been the focus of recent research in Renaissance studies: intercultural relations and concepts of temporality. While the importance of the classics for European identity has been extensively studied, their role in defining what lay beyond Europe’s margins has received less attention. Some scholarship, however, has shown the potential richness of the field: Craig Kallendorf’s reading of the *Aeneid*’s portrayal of colonized entities (*The Other Virgil*, 2007), for example, and Nancy Bisaha’s study of the competing portrayals of the Ottoman Turks as either Goths, Vandals, Scythians or heirs to the Trojans and Romans (*Creating East and West*, 2006). Furthermore, the panel seeks to understand the temporal and explanatory concepts undergirding various early modern genealogies, ethnographies, and histories. Although a topic of theory since Warburg, the problem of time and temporal relations in early modernity has received renewed attention with the publication of Nagel and Wood’s *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010). Applied beyond the original domain of art history, Nagel and Wood’s ideas prompt a wider re-evaluation of the importance of antiquity in framing our understanding of Renaissance Europe.

At stake is a view of the central conflicts in Europe's formative years not as exclusively early modern events, but rather as events crucially shaped by the vital force of classicism.

Potential topics include:

- How did differing claims to Greco-Roman heritage shape religious rhetoric and antagonisms? How did the interpretation of classical texts evolve with the shifting needs of their early modern readers, either in marginalizing or legitimizing particular groups? How do these texts transcend class lines, especially among the uneducated and illiterate?
- How did different national traditions of Humanism approach the contrasting degrees of religious alterity? How did classical writings and thought provide agency for marginalized groups?
- How can a deeper knowledge of classical texts reshape historical understandings of crusades, jihads, reformations, expulsions, and heresies? In teaching these encounters, what pedagogical methodologies can guide students toward recognition of the pervasive relevance of these texts?

Abstracts of no more than 150 words and a short CV should be sent as separate email attachments to [pramit.chaudhuri@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:pramit.chaudhuri@austin.utexas.edu) (please see [RSA guidelines for abstracts and CVs](#)). Abstracts will be judged anonymously, so please do not identify yourself in any way on the abstract page. Please include the following in the body of your email:

- your name, affiliation, email address
- your paper title (15-word maximum)
- relevant keywords

**Proposals must be received by August 10, 2018.**

Organized by David M. Reher (University of Chicago) and Keith Budner (UC-Berkeley) with the sponsorship of the Society for Early Modern Classical Reception (SEMCR)

